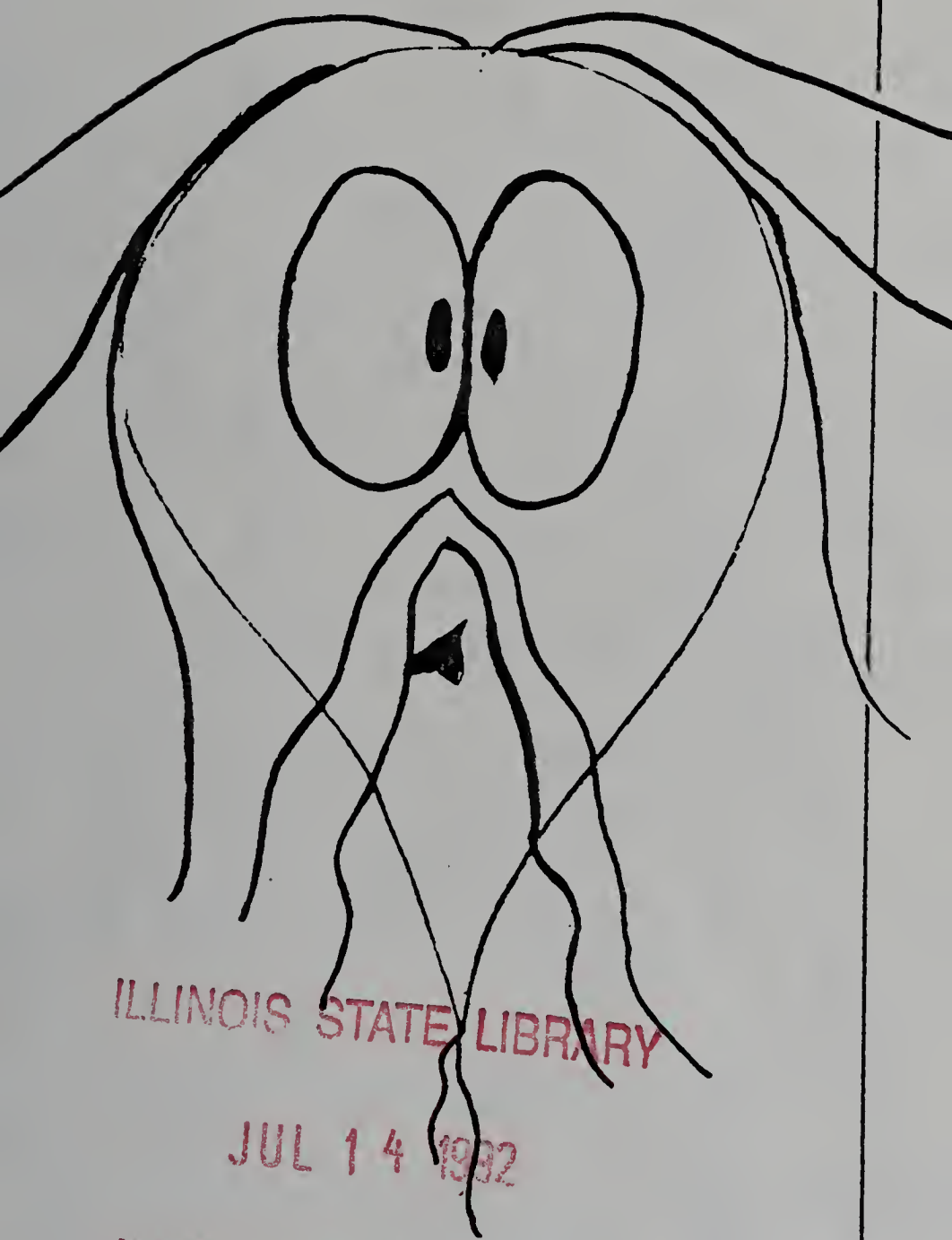


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Giardiasis



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What is Giardia?

Giardia lamblia is a germ. It causes **Giardiasis**, a disease of the digestive tract (stomach and intestines).

How does a person get Giardia?

- 1) By swallowing the germs that come from infected people, e.g. an infected person uses the bathroom and does not thoroughly wash his hands. The germs remain on the hands and can contaminate objects such as toys that young children put in their mouths.
- 2) By drinking contaminated water from streams, creeks or improperly treated tap water found in foreign countries.
- 3) By eating food that has been contaminated by the hands of an infected person who did not wash his hands after using the bathroom.

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What are the symptoms?

- Diarrhea
- Gas/bloating
- Abdominal pain
- Nausea
- Weakness
- Weight loss

Any one or a combination of these symptoms may occur. Failure to grow and develop properly is sometimes the only symptom in very young children.

Most people who get the germ do not appear sick. However, they can still spread the germ to other people.

How long do the symptoms last?

If not treated, most people are sick four to six weeks. A few people may have milder symptoms for months but are not sick all the time. This form is often hard to diagnose and may be mistaken for peptic ulcer, hiatal hernia or gallbladder disease.

Can Giardiasis be treated?

Yes. Several drugs are available for treatment. They must be prescribed by a doctor. Family members may be advised to be treated even if they have no symptoms. This is to prevent spread to others.

How can the disease be prevented?

By washing your hands!

Frequent and thorough handwashing is the **best** way to prevent the spread of giardiasis.

Handwashing must take place:

- after using the toilet
- after changing a diaper
- before preparing food
- before eating food
- before feeding children

Also:

- do not drink untreated water from rivers, streams or creeks.
- boil or treat unsafe water before drinking it.

Where can I get more information?

The Illinois Department of Public Health or your local health department should be contacted when giardiasis is suspected.



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